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CONTACTS: Jan Porath, 715-834-5043, jporath@uwgcv.org
Brian Larson, 715-834-1370, brianflarson@sbcglobal.net
Elizabeth Giese, 715-839-4718, Elizabeth.giese@co.eau-claire.wi.us

Healthy Communities receives grant to tackle excessive drinking

EAU CLAIRE – Healthy Communities in Eau Claire County has received a \$50,000 Healthy Communities Grant from Security Health Plan of Wisconsin to create community change around binge drinking in Eau Claire County through collaboration and education. The Eau Claire City-County Health Department is serving as the grant's fiscal agent.

Drink Responsibly – What Does That Mean? will seek to increase awareness of what binge drinking is and why we should care, which is the first step toward changing our alcohol culture. Healthy Communities is pleased to be awarded this grant to tackle this important health priority which has been repeatedly identified as an issue in primary and secondary data collection in our county, said Jan Porath, Co-Chair of Healthy Communities and Director of United Way in the Greater Chippewa Valley.

Studies by the University of Wisconsin and Health First Wisconsin calculate that excessive drinking costs Eau Claire County residents more than \$160 million annually. That's more than \$1,600 for every resident. "We can talk about lost productivity, greater health care costs, more money spent for criminal justice, but what it really comes down to are damaged lives," said Brian Larson, a Healthy Communities member.

Drink Responsibly – What Does That Mean will:

- Identify and create culturally relevant materials and tools for the 18-25 year old population
- Develop and implement a social media campaign to increase community awareness related to the extent and harm of binge drinking
- Connect directly with community members through presentations and assessment tools to build awareness and support for change

If people ages 18-25 who drink regularly are interested in sharing their thoughts about alcohol use, they are encouraged to contact Mike Valentine, Project Coordinator, at 715-577-3460, for more information.

Security Health Plan chose eight organizations to receive Health Communities Grants. The grants are for one year. "Security Health Plan believes it is important to support programs that solve real problems in our communities," said Security Health Plan Interim Chief Administrative Officer Julie Brussow. "Investing in the health of our communities is central to Security Health Plan's mission as a corporate citizen, as a part of the community."

"We want people to understand the difference between high and low risk drinking and how to drink in a safer and healthier way. Excessive alcohol use is a public health issue. Perceptions and practice won't change overnight, but this project will help us start to address this public health issue," said Lieske Giese, Director, Eau Claire City-County Health Department.